

CHICAGO - May 31, 2009
A beautiful, radiantly sunny day with cool breezes.

Dear Kate - Your pregnant fat letter has been here for almost 2 weeks now, and I pick it up from time to time, reading parts of it over - looking at the photos - thinking about what it is that we are trying to do in the long loch of a project. Maybe we should expand our title - "The long loch: ~~the~~ How we go on"? We are working on this project/process at a really good pace - a slow, contemplative, deliberate pace that allows for some deep dives and much coming up for air and surveying the horizon line. Ah, is there a fin above the water there? Or is it the British war submarine (nuclear submarine) that is deploying in bay loch, always ready to serve out death in defence of the nation. I was so struck by the fact that the COVE artist residence was on the same loch that has for so long been the station for the nuclear submarines, and that for 20 years there has been an on-going peace camp vigil on its banks. This is very significant for me as it brings together in an

I am drawn to the way Keesa's studio works make implicit her use of handling/testing/playing with materials as a way to think/see and be. And ask questions (apparently Keesa's notebooks were full of question marks). This resistance to any sense of need for completion, closure or demarcation I read 'read into, coming from my own present and not assuming this was necessarily Keesa's intention) as a progressive, political and feminist action and, for me, ties into notions of woman as a 'subject-in-process', the 'inbetween' status of woman as riddle re-enacted and a conscious resistance to hierarchy, patriarchy, matriarchy and linear chronologies and the inherent closure they entail. Keesa's studio works emphasis on 'trial' and 'play' relate to the influence Yvonne Rainer and her work with the Judson Dance Theater has/is having on my current

THE LONG LOCH: How Do We Go On From Here?
Faith Wilding and Kate Davis

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FRANCIS MCKEE

Correspondences

As an exhibition, *The Long Loch* grew from an earlier dialogue between Kate Davis and Faith Wilding, expanded later during a joint residency at Cove Park in Kilmeggan. The location of the residency – its' stunning landscape and its' proximity to the moorings of the British nuclear fleet – provided a series of metaphors that have underpinned their conversations ever since.

At the beginning of their collaboration, the artists decided to communicate through hand written letters, establishing a more deliberate pace to their research and exchange of thoughts. Letter writing, while now unfashionable, linked their thinking to a much longer and richer history of ideas. The more physical act of writing letters as opposed to emails for instance, gave an authority and rigour to the exchange that is missing from electronic messages.

Within the full range of their letters it is clear that their ideas are being informed by a wider series of references and their voracious reading habits. Among those writers and artists namechecked are Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Emma Goldman, Samuel Beckett, Frances Stark, Marguerite Duras, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Gregg Bordowitz, Jimmy Robert, Sally Potter, Agnes Martin, Annie Albers, Linder and Roni Horn. The letters, then, not only established the points of reference for the collaboration but a more openended, evolving library of works that could link past, present and future.

Extracts from the letters of Kate Davis and Faith Wilding:

I am writing this in the dented light of the Norfolk's Easter weekend. It is two months since your visit to Glasgow and since we began to discuss in person, ideas for our collaborative project which we have titled (at least for now), 'How do we go on (from Here)?' This title point to a shared desire to examine how a relationship between our own practices can be built upon to examine what a feminist heritage (we were looking for alternatives to 'legacy' weren't we. Do you think heritage may work?) can signify today and what an active engagement with rethinking and re-embodiment themes and ideas of past feminist work can ask of 'a present' in Glasgow, 2010. Not only, 'how do we go on from here?', but 'what is to be done?'

Maybe we should expand our title – "The Long Loch: How We Go On"? We are working on this project/process at a really good pace – a slow, contemplative, deliberate pace that allows for some deep dives and much coming up for air and surveying the horizon line.

...the loch seems to embody, as you say, Faith, the arts of life and death, or art and war, a riddle constantly re-enacted (as Rebecca Schneider described 'woman' in her react.feminism lecture in Berlin earlier this year)...I love your idea of expanding our title to "The Long Loch: How do we go on?" It seems to encompass those slippery depths...

Virginia Woolf describes how 'since no woman of sense and modesty could write books', they wrote letters. ... Yet the belittled status of letters seems to deny (as Woolf so aptly recognises) their significant and subversive potential. Echoed by your description, Faith, of a letter as a tool to formulate thought and define questions. A private space to clarify/express/delineate 'our own peculiar resources' as Yvonne Rainer puts it. In keeping with drawing, letter writing inhabits that valuable 'in between' space. As James Elkins describes drawing to John Berger, as 'the invaluable record of the encounter of a moving, thinking hand with the mesmerising space of potential forms that is simply called a 'blank sheet of paper''. I would suggest that letter writing accompanies drawing in relishing those qualities.

I was so struck by the fact that the Cove artist residence was on the same loch that has for so long been the station for the nuclear submarines, and that for 20 years there has been an on-going peace camp vigil on its banks. This is very significant for me as it brings together in an actual place the arts of life and death, or art and war...

In your letter of May 14th you quote Gregg Bordowitz "Is it possible that one only achieves originality by recognising the shape of the most basic forms?" This is an interesting question I've been mulling over in regard to my 'tear' paintings that I'm doing now. In a way, the long loch is a tear (and a tear in the landscape), it is a loch of tears that contains the leviathan of death...

FRANCIS MCKEE

This is what I'm finding with my tear form, which is a semiotic form that can be anything from a heart of bladder, to alchemical vessel, inverted comma, balloon, uterus, testicle, seed pod, flower, penis, etc And I have been captured by color, and by textures and by trying to paint liquidity, transparency....

I was watching a documentary on Agnes Martin (she's definitely a touchstone) the other night, and was overwhelmed by her singularity of work, thought, life. About her paintings she said: 'They are not about nothing – they are about meaning – the big emotions, like love and happiness, and innocence, and beauty.'

I loved your description of Martin's rigour Faith – that her 'sparse' works are far from 'sparse' and are about meaning; personal/universal meaning and not about nothing. Martin's declaration/observation brings me again to Gregg Bordowitz's words, 'Is it possible that one only achieves originality by recognising the shape of the most basic forms?' To which I would like to add the question, 'Is it possible that one only moves forward by revising the shape of the most basic forms?'

I've been reading *The Feminine and the Sacred*, a remarkable exchange of letters between the French essayist/novelist & psychologist Catherine Clément and the psychoanalyst & linguist Julia Kristeva. It is an illuminating and uplifting book by these two leading feminist intellectuals, and deeply loving also. In one letter Kristeva writes: 'What if the ancestral division between 'those who give life' (women) and 'those who give meaning' (men) were in the process of disappearing? What do you think? It would be a radical upheaval, never before seen. Sufficient to herald a new era of the sacred in fact, which might well be the surprise of this third millennium. After two thousand years of world history dominated by the sacredness of the Baby Jesus, might women be in a position to give a different coloration to the ultimate sacred, the miracle of human life: not life for itself, but life bearing meaning, for the formulation of which women are called upon to offer their desire and their words?'

Whilst I agree in part with her suggestion that ... 'women might be in a position to give a different coloration to the ultimate sacred, the miracle of human life...' I feel wary of attempting to make women 'sacred'. And whilst I recognise Kristeva is not entirely suggesting that here, I think what could be really progressive and constructive could be to unpick and loose the

notion of an institutional 'sacred'. But if a pre-determined sense of the 'sacred' is buried and lost, do other forms of hope need to replace it? What a shape of possibility! Can you see/imagine it Faith?

It is clear to me that one way I go on is through the richness of my conversations with the living and the dead who have been able to make art and other creative works...

The above living and dead are what I believe we meant when we invoked Yvonne Rainer's 'our own peculiar resources'. I think this is a fruitful way to proceed for both of us – we are listing touchstones and collecting those lists (I append one here). We will make a heap of all we can find and use it in our exhibition – we could make a whole room full of 'peculiar resources' almost set up as our 'working laboratory'.

You invoked also 'The spaces between us'. This brings me to one of my 'peculiar resources' – Luce Irigaray. The watchword she has given us is: 'things can be thought differently'. This is what the best of feminist thought, theory, art has done and has passed to us – we take up that challenge now. The way we are collaborating, the way we began and are now going on, is not charted yet – we are creating it as we navigate this long loch of a project...

To refer to Irigaray again, can we move from a 'hierarchical transmission of an already established discourse and language, order and law' to 'an exchange of meaning between us here and now?' Has a feminist foundation enabled us to do this?...I have been reading Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born' from 1976 and was struck by her comment that 'the most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities – only when we can wish imaginatively and courageously for ourselves can we wish unfetteredly for our daughters'.

I very much respond to your thinking about the loch. Why am I (and we) so drawn to that loch? As you point out, it has multiple meanings and histories – I see it in my mind's eye on the stormy day we crossed it on the ferry, and then on that cold day when it reflected the snow covered mountains on it's shore. I fantasise the shapes of the stealthy nuclear submarines and shudder at the thought of the nuclear war-heads stored on its shores...

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

THE LONG LOCH: How Do We Go On From Here? Faith Wilding and Kate Davis

